

October 8, 2009

WASHINGTON, DC –U.S. Rep. Michael Arcuri (NY-24) has introduced bipartisan legislation to encourage participation in employer sponsored health and wellness prevention programs to promote health living and lower health care costs. By offering employees a reduction in their insurance premiums if they meet certain health goals or take part in healthy activities, such as quitting smoking, exercising, or working to lower blood pressure or cholesterol, employers have been successful in beginning to control health care costs for both the business and the employee, and the entire health care system.

The legislation, H.R. 3688, introduced by Arcuri and colleague Rep. Steve Buyer (R-IN), would raise the cap on health insurance premium discounts for participation in a wellness program from 20 percent to 30 percent. Under the bill, the Secretary of Health and Human Services would have the authority to raise the discount cap to 50 percent in the future if appropriate.

“The healthcare crisis in America has a lot to do with the strain on the system caused by increases in unhealthy lifestyle habits which lead to serious health issues,” **Arcuri said**. “This legislation will make health care more affordable for everyone and I will continue to promote employer wellness programs to help Americans become healthier and decrease the burden on our healthcare system.

Helping people lead healthier lives is essential to controlling the cost of health care for everyone. This bill will make health insurance premiums more affordable and will give individuals control over premium prices.”

U.S. Rep. Steve Buyer (R-IN), co-author of H.R. 3688, said, “I support health care policies that encourage individuals to make healthy choices such as controlling their weight, ending their tobacco use, and managing their diabetes. Wellness programs have been used by companies across the U.S. to greatly decrease health care costs for employers and employees while improving individuals’ health. I am encouraged by the growing support in Congress to expand these programs, and I look forward to working with Congressman Arcuri to move H.R. 3688 forward in the health reform debate. Healthy people have lower health care costs, and H.R. 3688 would give people greater incentives to make healthy decisions which will save them, their families, and our country money.”

Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), providing care for people with chronic diseases accounts for more than 75 percent of the \$2 trillion the United States spends on health care each year. Addressing the chronic disease and obesity epidemic in our country is critical to controlling the skyrocketing cost of health care.

Current regulations issued under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) cap the discount an employee may receive on his or her insurance premium at 20 percent. Expansion of these successful programs has the potential to reduce costs for the U.S. health care system as a whole. H.R. 3688 would codify existing premium discount regulations under HIPAA and increase the percentage cap to further incentivize health and wellness activities. A similar premium discount provision is included in legislation passed by two Senate Committees in recent weeks with strong bi-partisan support. .

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